



Eulogy of Mary Ellen (Ellenmae) Zimmermann, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Dec. 3, 2025

Good morning and welcome to the celebration of life of our Sister Mary Ellen Zimmermann.

"Mary Ellen is a very gracious, gentle, and beautiful person. She is genuine and doesn't think about herself. She is devoted to her vocation [and] those whom she serves." These were the words of the pastor at St. Mary of Vernon in Mundelein, Ill., where Mary Ellen served seven years as the associate director of religious education.

Mary Ellen "Lolly" Zimmermann was born in Milwaukee on Nov. 8, 1932. She was the youngest of the four daughters of James Edward Zimmermann. Marie (Seeboth) Zimmermann, the mother of the oldest daughter Elaine, died when Elaine was five. James later married Helen Margaret Jongebloed and they were blessed with daughters Janet, Margaret and Mary Ellen. In an interview about "Sister sisters," Margaret praised her parents saying, "they couldn't have been better" and that they provided their children with "an ideal family life" which included a Catholic education. All the girls attended St. Sebastian ES and then Holy Angels Academy where they were taught by the BVMs.

Margaret answered the call to religious life entering the congregation in 1947. As a teenager, Mary Ellen often visited her sister at the Motherhouse. "I could see she was happy and the sisters were having good times together and enjoying life," she commented. Mary Ellen wanted to enter after graduating from Holy Angels in 1950 but waited an extra year at her mother's request. One sister was married, another was about to be married, and Margaret was already at Mount Carmel. Mary Ellen was the last child at home. She attended Marquette University in Milwaukee during her year of waiting.

On Sept. 8, 1951, Mary Ellen entered the BVM congregation. She received the name Ellenmae upon her reception on March 19, 1952. She later obtained permission to change her religious name to Ellen Mary after a novice with that name returned home. She professed her first vows on March 19, 1954, and lived 74 years as a BVM.

Mary Ellen earned a bachelor's degree in history with a philosophy minor from San Diego College for Women in 1962, and a master's degree in religious education from Loyola University-Chicago in 1979. She completed her Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, Ill., in 1989.

Mary Ellen served as an elementary teacher for 39 years. She was missioned in California at St. Bernard in Los Angeles, St. Anne in Santa Ana, Holy Family in Glendale and St. Patrick in Carlsbad. In Illinois, she taught at Annunciation in Chicago, St. Peter in Antioch, and Lake Shore Catholic Academy in Mundelein. She also taught at St. Catherine in Kansas City, Mo.

As mentioned earlier, Mary Ellen was the associate DRE at St. Mary of Vernon. Besides assisting in the overall administration of programs, she also taught the "little ones" in kindergarten through fifth grade. Her cheerful stories about her experiences in California and in Chicago's inner city were a valued addition to classroom conversations. MaryEllen also ministered as associate DRE as well as secretary at St. James Parish in Chicago, and as a DRE and learning center coordinator at St. Therese Parish in Palms Springs, Calif. Everything she did

regarding religious education was done thoughtfully, creatively, and faithfully. She also encouraged others to gradually assume responsibility for various areas of the program.

Mary Ellen received praise from coworkers and administration alike. A religious coordinator commented, "Mary Ellen is a very conscientious woman, highly intelligent and with a very engaging personality. [She] is resourceful, dependable and untiring in her efforts to relate to people." A coworker wrote, "It would be a joy to have everyone on the team as efficient, honest, sincere and willing as Mary Ellen. . . She enjoys the work and life in general." Yet when a difference of opinion arose, Mary Ellen was able to speak her mind honestly and graciously accepted the final decision. The principal at St. Peter in Antioch, Ill., wrote, "Her graciousness is the reflection of a strong determination to bring Christ into the lives of others in all her actions."

Mary Ellen served the BVM congregation as the associate director of Marian Hall for three years. As a "behind-the-scenes person," she was always available to doing the many small, unassuming, yet very necessary, tasks that lightened the load of the administrator. She approached these duties with the same kindness, sensitivity, compassion and gentle sense of humor as she did all her ministries.

In 2003, Mary Ellen moved in with Patricia DaCosta and her two feline roommates. Mary Ellen loved the cats as much as Pat did. After both cats died, they decided to adopt female siblings whom they called Sweetie and Schätzchen (SHET-schen), "Sweetie" in German.

Besides cats, Mary Ellen liked football and baseball and was a loyal fan of the Green Bay Packers and the Milwaukee Brewers her entire life. She was a devoted member of the large Zimmermann family who celebrated birthdays, baptisms, weddings and many other joyful occasions together. She was a devoted religious woman who cared deeply about her community whom she called her "special family." She was a good friend to many and a witness to all by the way she lived her life.

St. Paul intreated the Philippians to "Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. . . Then the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:4, 9). Mary Ellen's kindness, gentleness, and graciousness were well known by the people she met and served in this life. By our faith, we confidently celebrate her new life and the peace she now knows resting in the loving arms of Jesus.